

VOL. 62
NO. 3

MAY-JUNE 2025

Kaktos Komments

a bimonthly publication of the Houston Cactus and Succulent Society
to promote the study of cacti and other succulents



Mammillaria hahniana
by John Weistroffer



Houston Cactus and Succulent Society
Founded in 1963
Affiliated with the Cactus & Succulent Society of America



From the Editor

Karla Halpaap-Wood

We had a great Spring Sale May 2 and 3. Like usual Eddie did a phenomenal job, and everybody was happy. We had lots of volunteer helpers. Thank you! We also gained 10 new members.

Take a peek at the new website, hcsstex.com. Sarai is still working on it. For now the old site still works.

Membership

Sara Ortiz

On March 26, 2025, we met at the Metropolitan Multiservice Center. We had thirty-four members and four guests in attendance. Eric Lundberg's program was called "Feed Me - Fertilization strategies for potted cacti and succulents". Alex Zav presented the Cactus of the Month, *Matucana weberbaueri*. Echo Pang presented the Succulent of the Month, *Conophytum pellucidum* v. *terricolor*. Liliana and Mike also presented their plants of the month of February during the March meeting. We had a lot of fun with door prizes and raffle plants donated by our members.

On April 23, 2025, a meeting was held at the Metropolitan Multiservice Center. Thirty-two members and one guest attended. We were so happy to welcome four new members as well. Jacob Martin presented the program "Growing cacti and succulents from seed." Joseph Rodd presented the March Cactus of the Month, *Browningia hertlingiana*. Lauren Morris presented the Succulent of the Month, *Curio rowleyanus*. We had a great time with the door prizes and raffle plants that our members generously donated.

Calendar:

May 14, 2025	7:00 pm Board Meeting via Zoom
May 28, 2025	7:00 pm Membership Meeting, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center Program: "Bring Back the Pollinators" by Elliot Gordon, Xerces Society. Zoom
June 25, 2025	7:00 pm Membership Meeting, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center Program: "Backroads of Southern Arizona" by David Van Langen
July 1, 2025	Deadline for submitting articles for the KK.

May and June HCSS Educational Programs

Echo Pang

May 28th, 7pm: “Bring Back the Pollinators” by Elliott Gordon, Ambassador of the Xerces Society (Zoom program)

Introduction:

Although pollinator conservation is a big task, it all begins with each of us adopting four simple steps: growing pollinator-friendly flowers, providing nest sites, avoiding pesticides, and spreading the word. With these core values, pollinator conservation can be adapted to any location, whether you tend an urban community garden or a suburban yard, work in a city park or on a farm. Join Elliott Gordon, volunteer ambassador, for an introduction to Texas’s native bees and plenty of cactus and succulent pictures.

Speaker biography:

Elliott Gordon is a geotechnical engineer in New Mexico and a volunteer ambassador for the Xerces Society. He likes to photograph all of the wildlife in his pollinator garden, which is home to 165 species of native plants that have attracted 1,650 species of insects. As a member of the Cactus & Succulent Society of New Mexico, he is learning to grow native cactus and cold hardy mesembs from seed. He is also an amateur entomologist studying a rare group of native bee parasites called wedge-shaped beetles.



Cactus bee in tree cholla flower



Flower beetles in prickly pear flower



Yucca moth

Photos by: Elliot Gordon

June 25th, 7pm: "Backroads of Southern Arizona" by David Van Langen

Quick bio about David: "I've been messing with cactus and critters since I was a young kid. From tarantulas to box turtles when I was 3- 4 years old. I began my cactus obsession when I was maybe 6. I saw opuntia on my uncle's dairy and on a deer lease that sent me to the western movies!! John Wayne/ cowboys/ desert. Been hooked ever since."



March and April Educational Program Summary

Echo Pang

March: “Feed Me! Fertilization Strategy for Potted Cacti and Succulents” by Eric Lundberg

Eric Lundberg from Cave Creek, Arizona, where he grows his cacti and succulent collection primarily from seeds, achieving remarkable results through his horticultural expertise and over 30 years of experience in wholesale nursery production, came to Houston and gave an expert talk on plant science and fertilization to HCSS members this spring. Mr. Lundberg’s presentation began with teaching the basics of plant and soil science, explaining how plants absorb nutrients from the soil. He then offered practical advice on designing effective potting media and adjusting the pH of water (to 6.0–6.5 using white vinegar) to enhance porosity and aeration for cacti and succulents. Equipping the audience with this scientific foundation, he demonstrated his fertilization strategies of applying fertilizer at 50 ppm nitrogen (25 ppm for seedlings under 8 weeks old). The full presentation is available on HCSS YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/RSJNencCIL8?si=Qynlvk1m-7ymd9dR>



In a follow-up letter to HCSS members, Mr. Lundberg wrote:

“As a reminder, this fertilizer can be used on any plants, including landscape flowers or shrubs. I use it on my orchids too... One 25 lb. bag of 20-20-20 makes about 12,000 gallons of 50 ppm solution. Depending on your water usage, consider sharing a bag among friends. I’ve had good experiences buying Peters products from Seed World in Florida.”

April: “Growing Cacti and Succulents from Seeds” by Jacob Martin

Jacob Martin, HCSS member, owner of Old School Produce Nursery, and head of horticulture and greenhouse manager at Mercer Botanical Gardens, shared his insights in April on the importance and practicality of growing these plants from seeds. His engaging presentation covered seed shelf life across species, techniques for cleaning and storing seeds, various sowing methods, and scarification strategies for hard-to-germinate varieties. Jacob also revealed his seedling soil mix and offered tips for acclimating and caring for delicate seedlings during their critical early months.

Jacob’s presentation is also available on the HCSS YouTube Channel: https://youtu.be/eciK1gDNwhs?si=-ayrDQ80_0E0du4F, so are all past programs dating back to January 2024.



May Cactus of the Month

David Van Langen

Coryphantha sulcata

Coryphantha sulcata is low growing, usually clustering egg shaped plant that can be found across the heart of Texas. It is found in a strip from Fort Worth south to near Columbus and westward to near Del Rio. The main stem is normally about 2-3" tall and equally as wide. Pups form on the bottom tubercles and some clumps can become 12" across. Yellow to golden colored flowers with a red to orange throat usually bloom in May and are quite showy compared to the normally "dull" plant itself. The following fruits are a dull dark greenish red, juicy and concealed within the spines. In the eastern part of its range *C. sulcata* tends to form large clumps and is looks very similar to *Escobaria missouriensis*, with which it grows side by side in many locations. A common trait for Coryphanthas, young plants usually lack the strong central spine that is common on older plants. Plants found in the western part of its range very closely resemble *Coryphantha echinus*



and do not form near as large of clumps as do the eastern varieties. The plants are found growing in shallow soils in rocky areas. They are often found on limestone or gravelly clay areas that support sparse grasses and scrub. They are seldom found in deep rich soils as the lush grasses and weedy species drown them out. Many times this plant is found growing close to juniper and live oak in elevated, rocky locations and seem to enjoy a little shade even though *C. sulcata* does not require the shade as does its close kin *Escobaria missouriensis*.

Coryphantha sulcata deserves much more attention that it gets and should be a much more popular plant. It can be found as close to Houston as Fayetteville, LaGrange, Giddings and Navasota. On suitable locations, *C. sulcata* can be found growing in these areas along with *Escobaria missouriensis*, *Echinocereus reichenbachii* and *Echinocactus texensis*.

The fact that it is found within 100 miles of Houston gives a hint that it can handle much more rain than the pure desert varieties of Texas cactus. Given a very quick draining soil this plant does fairly well here in the Houston area.

To sum it all up, *Coryphantha sulcata* should be on every collector's list. Being native to much of Texas, it will survive any cold temps that the gulf coast will see. It is often overlooked but is well worth the effort here in Houston.

It is one of the few non-Opuntia types that grow so close to Houston-- a natural choice species for our area!



May Succulent of the Month

Jason Chretien

Euphorbia ramena: A Treasure from Madagascar's Red Tsingy Region

NAME: *Euphorbia ramena*

SYNONYMS: None widely recognized

COMMON NAME(S): None established; sometimes referred to as "Red Tsingy Euphorbia"

HABITAT/DISTRIBUTION: Endemic to northern Madagascar, especially the Antsiranana region and the Red Tsingy area

DESCRIPTION

Euphorbia ramena is a striking, caudiciform succulent in the *Euphorbiaceae* family, highly prized by collectors for its unusual form and rarity. The species name "ramena" is derived from the Malagasy word for "red," referencing both the reddish bristle-like hairs at the shoot tips and the iron-rich, lateritic soils of its native habitat.

- **Growth Form:** This geophytic succulent features a pronounced contrast between its thick, swollen caudex (rootstock) and its thinner, erect, branched stems. The caudex is often displayed above the soil, a key attraction for enthusiasts.
- **Stems:** Brown, with dense red bristles at the apex—more pronounced than in closely related species.
- **Leaves:** New leaves and inflorescences emerge in winter, while older leaves wither and drop in spring. The plant enters dormancy in summer.
- **Flowers:** Produces small, inconspicuous inflorescences typical of the *Euphorbia* genus.

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

Euphorbia ramena is native to the steep, inaccessible limestone pinnacles of the Red Tsingy region in northern Madagascar. It thrives in seasonally dry tropical biomes, rooted in gritty, sandy, well-drained soils rich in iron and minerals. The caudex acts as a water reservoir, allowing the plant to survive prolonged drought and making it tolerant of under-watering.

CULTIVATION AND CARE

Euphorbia ramena is considered a challenging species for cultivation, mainly due to its susceptibility to rot if overwatered or kept cold and damp during dormancy. Following Birham's caudiciform care framework, here are key guidelines:

Watering:

- Water primarily in winter, during the active growth period.
- Keep almost completely dry in summer dormancy.
- Never allow water to stand around the roots.

Soil:

- Requires a very well-drained, sandy or gritty potting mix with minimal organic matter.



Light:

- Prefers full sun to light shade; intolerant of low light.

Temperature:

- Needs warmth year-round; suitable only for tropical or subtropical climates (USDA Zones 10–11). Protect from cold.

Fertilization:

- Use a cactus and succulent fertilizer high in potassium during the growing season.

Propagation:

- Can only be propagated by seed; cuttings are not viable.

Pests/Diseases:

- Prone to rot if overwatered or in poor drainage. The milky latex sap is toxic and can cause skin irritation.

REMARKS AND COLLECTOR NOTES

Euphorbia ramena is a true collector's plant, valued for its sculptural caudex and rarity. Its self-fertility allows for seed production without cross-pollination, but successful cultivation requires vigilance against overwatering and cold. The toxic latex sap is a common feature of Euphorbias—handle with care.

PHOTOS

All photos accompanying this article are my own.

REFERENCES

- Climate data for northern Madagascar: NomadSeason
- Soil information: Wikipedia, "Laterite"
- Cultivation and care insights: Birham's Caudiciform Care Framework

Final Note:

Euphorbia ramena stands as a testament to Madagascar's botanical diversity and the unique adaptations of caudiciform succulents. With careful attention to its specialized needs, it can reward growers with its distinctive beauty and resilience



June Cactus of the Month**Jennifer Peskey*****Mammillaria bocasana* Poselg.****Synonyms:**

- *Cactus bocasanus*
- *Chilita bocasana*
- *Ebnerella bocasana*
- *Krainzia bocasana*
- *Neomammillaria bocasana*

Common Names:

- Powder Puff Cactus
- Snowball Cactus
- Fishhooks

Habitat:

Mammillaria bocasana was first collected in Sierra de Bocas in Mexico, which is the reason for the name “Bocansana”. It can be found in volcanic rocks on canyon walls and in steep slopes in semi - desert habitats.

Description:

Mammillaria bocasana is a small clumping cactus that is covered with silky white hairs and yellow to red hooked spines on each cluster. They look like cotton balls, hence the nickname “Powder Puff Cactus”. The hooked spines were once used as fish hooks in Mexico. There are different varieties with varying wool and flower colors.

In spring and summer it flowers, and there can be white, yellow or pink flowers that are 1 inch long and 0.6 inches wide. Flowers grow at the top of the stem in a crown-like pattern. They produce rosy pink fruit that are 1 inch long. *Mammillaria bocasana* can grow up to 5 inches tall and 3 inches wide.



Cultivation/ Growth:

Mammillaria bocansana is fairly easy to grow. They need filtered light if grown outdoors because in its natural habitat it grows under bushes. Sunburn may occur if it's exposed to too much sun. Too much sun can enhance flowering and cause a bronzing of the plant. *Mammillaria bocansana* is cold hardy if the soil is dry. During the growing season be careful watering as *Mammillaria bocansana* are prone to root rot.

Availability:

Mammillaria bocansana can be found at most online cactus stores but they are sometimes sold out due to their popularity.

References:

- <https://www.giromagicactusandsucculents.com/mammillaria-bocasana>
- <https://www.gardenia.net/plant/mammillaria-bocasana>
- http://www.llifle.com/Encyclopedia/CACTI/Family/Cactaceae/8970/Mammillaria_bocasana

Pictures by Jennifer Peskey

June Succulent of the Month

Karla Halpaap-Wood

Frerea indica

Family: *Asclepiadaceae*

Genus: *Frerea*

Synonyms: *Boucerosia frerei*, *Caralluma frerei*, *Desmidorchis dalzellii*, *Ceropegia frerei*

Frerea indica is monotypic, meaning there is only one species in the genus.

It is named for Sir Henry Bartle Edward Frere (1815 - 1884), 1st Governor of Bombay, botanist.

Habitat/Distribution: It grows only in the Maharashtra state in India, on rocks at an elevation of 2800-4500' (850-1400m) The plant is considered endangered in habitat.

Description: *Frerea indica* is a succulent with trailing stems. It is the only stapeliad to grow real leaves. Stems are thick, angled with swollen nodes. Leaves are fleshy, up to 2" long. In habitat the leaves grow during the rainy season and fall off during the dry season. It has typical stapeliad star shaped flowers, red with markings. USDA hardiness zone 10b to 11b.

Cultivation/Growth: Like any other stapeliad it needs light to bloom, but prefers filtered light. It needs to be watered in the warm months to be able to grow leaves and bloom. But like all stapeliads the soil needs to be very porous and the plant should never stand in water. In the winter it needs to be dry and protected from cold.



Availability: Kyle's plants, https://kylesplants.com/products/frerea-indica?_pos=1&_sid=28cffb613&_ss=r

My experience: I got this plant from Grant Wells' estate. I got it in late summer and it looked very dry, hardly alive. I watered it and it grew quite fast, then I moved it into the greenhouse for the winter and gave it an occasional watering, which was too much. In the spring all stem were soft at the roots, but the tops were still good. I re-rooted the tops successfully. Then in the second year towards end of summer I had several blooms and was very happy. Last winter I did not water at all, even my small greenhouse tends to overheat when it's very sunny, but the plant was healthy in the spring, no rotting at all. By April the leaves started sprouting and now, beginning of May, I see the first buds forming.



References

<https://www.inaturalist.org/taxa/787130-Boucerosia-frerei>

<https://succulent-plant.com/families/apocynaceae/asclepiadaceae/frerea.html>

<https://worldofsucculents.com/frerea-indica/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boucerosia_frerei

<http://jardinerongsunog.blogspot.com/2018/07/frerea-indica-stapeliad-that-almost-got.html>



Stems during winter

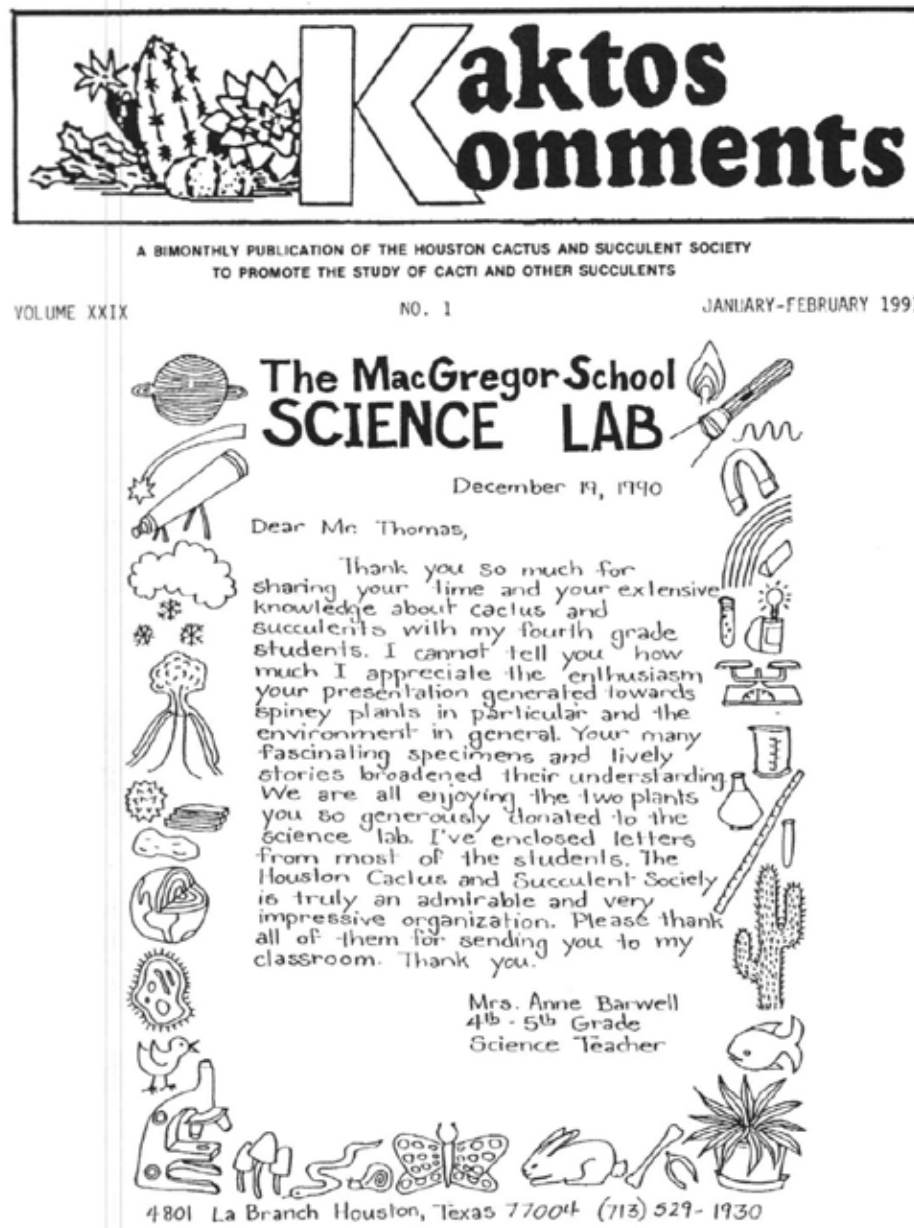
Field trip to Houston Botanic Gardens April 12



FROM THE KK ARCHIVES

Liliana Cracraft

On the cover of the KK from January-February 1991, a very nice letter addressed to Dave Thomas was sent by a science teacher from the MacGregor Elementary School on 4801 La Branch, where Dave gave a presentation to 4th grade students. It includes a wonderful message, and amazing drawings.



Equally amazing, was a note about this cover provided by Dave. He said:

It is of no importance whose name appears on the letter, but it is of great importance that club members do these or similar types of programs. The sentence on the letter that states: "The Houston Cactus and Succulent Society is truly an admirable and very impressive organization." is what we should all be about. It must be one of our highest priorities to do any and everything we can to educate the general public.

I totally agree with you Dave!

Potting Party April 26





and lunch afterwards

Part II



Photos: Kristi Schmidt

Spring Sale May 2 and 3







Photos: Kristi Schmidt

HCSS Leadership and Contact Info

President: Andrea Varesic
First Vice President: Echo Pang
Second Vice President: Vicki Treybig
Recording Secretary: Alexander Zabula
Treasurer: Karina Boese
KK editor: Karla Halpaap-Wood
Webmaster: Sarai Ramirez

Membership: Sara Ortiz
Education: Sabrina Kamioka
Ways and Means: Eddie Novak
CSSA affiliate: Liliana Cracraft

Contact email: hcsspresident@hcsstex.org